

Intergenerational Studies

Linking Senior Citizens and High School Students through Oral History

- 1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.**

As part of the elective class in sociology senior citizens from the community attend one class a week for 10-15 weeks. The high school students and senior citizens work together in small groups and begin a discussion that is centered on a selected social institution in a comparative analysis of past and present. Students take notes regarding the information exchange for a follow-up discussion in class the next day. The class can accommodate up to 20 senior citizens. To open the discourse between these two age groups a structured list of topics, leading questions and guidelines is provided for both the senior citizens and high school students. The list below includes only samples of the leading questions from the topic areas because of limited application space.

- **Class One: Opening program, welcome and first topic: Education and Technology**
Questions focus on a comparative analysis of schools of the past to today, including discipline problems, public attitudes toward education, respect, peer pressure, etc.
- **Class Two: World War II: Memories and Recollections**
Questions focus on the impact WW II had on their lives, willingness of people to make sacrifices for the common good, heroes, the atomic bomb, etc.
- **Class Three: Jobs, Occupations and the World of Work**
Discussion centers on the senior citizen's work experience and career, i.e., changes in the employment market, favorite type of work, retirement, career selection, job satisfaction, etc.
- **Marriage and Family Life**
Questions focus on changes in marriage patterns, i.e., divorce, having children, single parent families, stress in the family, neighborhoods, etc.
- **Music, Today and Yesterday**
Questions focus on the way music has changed in the past 70 years and the depth to which music impacted or impacts both groups.
- **Major Changes in the Past 70 years**
What are the major changes you have seen in the past 70 years (technology, education, music, sports, communication, entertainment, families, occupations, marriage, morals, attitudes, etc)? What would you like to see changed in the future?

- **Cinema and Films, Then and Now**
Questions focus on the cost of seeing a film, accuracy of portrayals in past and present films, drive-in theaters, controversial films, etc.
- **Dating and Teenage Life**
Questions focus on dating patterns then and now, the first date, curfews, blind dates, parental supervision, going steady, etc.
- **Happy New Year! Memorable Experiences**
Senior citizens and students share a New Year's celebration and discuss the holiday, traditional celebrations and New Year's today.
- **Final Farewells**
The senior citizens and students have bonded over the weeks of sharing experiences. This activity focuses on farewells and developing future contacts. In many cases the seniors and students develop long-lasting relationships.
- **Wedding Activity**
As part of the sociology class objectives in the unit on marriage and the family students examine the cultural traits surrounding the marriage ritual in the United States. Students reenact a marriage ceremony with all of the trimmings. Students select a role related to the ritual and research the costs and responsibilities associated with that role. They then act out a traditional marriage ceremony. The senior citizens participate in the development and celebration of this ceremony by giving away the bride and assuming the role of elders at a wedding ceremony.

Objectives

- Students and senior citizens will analyze the selected social institutions in a comparative analysis of past and present.
- Students and senior citizens will bridge the generation gap, sharing information on a variety of subjects.
- Students will compare and contrast information about the past utilizing the senior citizens as a primary resource.

This practice provides both the senior citizens and high school students the opportunity to bridge the cultural gap that separates these two groups. There are many stereotypes that each group holds toward the other. These stereotypes quickly disintegrate in the classroom environment. A mutual interest and respect develops between the two groups. Both groups demonstrate a great deal of interest in the comments and perceptions shared during the focus group discussions.

This practice promotes high student achievement in many ways. The focus groups provide meaningful interactions and challenges that promote character development. Students write about their experiences with the senior citizens and consider the important element of social change within the context of the sociology curriculum. Areas of study in sociology become more interesting with the enhanced perspective provided by the senior citizens. Comparative analysis, an important component in the development of analysis skills, is used on a regular basis in class activities.

- 2. List the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.**

Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards

- 1) All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills. By working in intergenerational groups, students are developing communication skills and developing an array of skills associated with sociability. They can work on teams and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Students analyze the world of work as it has changed through time.
- 2) All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Students compare and contrast their lives with the lives of senior citizens who experienced many of the turning points in history. This provides students with invaluable information from a primary source covering a wide range of social and historical issues.

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Social Studies

(It is necessary to provide a summative report due to the length of the standards and the extensive correlation between the activities in this project and the standards.)

Standards 1 and 2: These standards define student proficiencies in the area of democratic citizenship. This project effectively correlates to numerous cumulative progress indicators in that it is based in the study of the roles of individuals in many different capacities and examines citizenship responsibilities as viewed by preceding generations.

Standard 3: Standard three defines student proficiencies in the content and skills related to political and diplomatic history. This project correlates to numerous cumulative progress indicators in that it analyzes and contrasts controversial issues today in relation to the historical evolution of these issues in United States history. **Standard 4:** Standard four defines student proficiencies in the content and skills related to the history of societal ideas and forces. Students are studying the history of societal ideas and forces by using senior citizens as a primary resource. They compare and contrast current ideas and forces with those of the past.

Standard 5: Standard five defines student proficiencies in the content and skills related to the understanding of varying cultures throughout history. Students are exposed to many different cultures as represented by the various backgrounds of the senior citizens. They gain insight into the different cultural expressions that comprise American society and learn to adapt to environments that require understanding of the culture of other groups. Senior citizens themselves represent a cultural group within the United States and students begin to understand the unique problems and opportunities faced by their older group partners.

- 3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.**

In addition to meeting the educational needs of students this practice addresses the generation gap head on. Students and senior citizens share their

experiences and perceptions on a variety of societal issues and historical events over an extended period of time. Students and senior citizens gain insight into each other's world and begin to understand the myths and stereotypes associated with their position in society. They develop meaningful dialogues and relationships that are carried over into each other's daily experiences. This practice DOES bridge the generation gap. In addition, this practice illuminates history for the students in a way that is unavailable in the traditional approach to the study of history. The senior citizens have experiences that range through the course of history, and they share their life's stories and poignant moments with the students. If you examine the broad range of topics and the process that structures the dialogues you can see that this process covers historical phenomenon as well as the social world. As the sociology class develops further analysis of societal ideas and forces, the input from the senior citizens illuminates the content and allows the students to make many connections to the past.

The teacher assesses student performance related to the objectives by using an INTERGENERATIONAL STUDIES REPORT FORM. In each group session students record their notes, responses and questions on the report form. Students are required to keep a record of the discussions in their groups in relation to the senior citizen who is speaking and the information discussed. These report forms provide the basis for the discussion that takes place in follow-up activities related to the group sessions. The forms are collected by the teacher and are correlated to the performance of the students in their group assignments for a grade. Information from the discussions is included on assessments given by the teacher on a regular basis. Assessment is carried out in the traditional manner utilizing statistical measures and also includes performance assessment in the role playing of a wedding ceremony. Students conduct a wedding ceremony that requires each student to research the role they play, including financial reports that describe the costs of the wedding, honeymoon, etc.

4. Describe how you would replicate this practice in another school and/or district.

This practice becomes part of an existing program and is easily replicated. It can be developed in many different subject areas. Senior citizens can be contacted in a number of ways, but developing a contact with the local senior citizens center is the most productive. They are more than willing to participate and look forward to developing activities for their clients. Our program has developed standard guidelines, activities and questions that guide the discussion groups. A school can develop their own format and leading questions, or use our model. Most of the questions and activities flow naturally from the discussions in the focus groups. There are many possibilities in a program of this nature. The most important aspect of replicating this practice is insuring that a structure is developed which guides the activities. Distributing a schedule of events for each focus group session assures that students and senior citizens understand the process. Involving students in the process from the very beginning allows students to become involved in decision making and creates an interesting array of topics and activities from year to year. This is an outstanding program that can be easily replicated in any school district.